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Multi-stakeholder dialogue

Discussion paper contributed by the children and youth major group

Summary

Within the United Nations Forum on Forests and in the context of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests, the children and youth major group is advocating for education and intergenerational equity: education as a tool to transfer knowledge from the one generation to the other and to learn how, for example, to deal sustainably with our forests. Intergenerational equity as a concept emphasizes the importance of the forests of today, with all the services and products they provide, which should also be available for future generations. Both of these are well reflected in the non-legally binding instrument. The importance of education and capacity-building is stressed in five paragraphs of that instrument. That sustainable forest management is a key factor for intergenerational equity is agreed upon as a concept, inter alia, in the four global objectives of the instrument.

This is an encouraging message. However, time is running short. The children and youth major group is concerned about the successful implementation of the non-legally binding instrument. The variety of threats to forests is increasing rather than decreasing. Loss of forest cover and climate change make us worry about future opportunities for a growing number of young people worldwide, in particular in rural areas of developing countries. We therefore call for action. The content of the non-legally binding instrument has good potential, but its implementation has to take off. Therefore, sufficient resources should be mobilized to actually make the agreement on forests start to work. To make resources flow from investing to receiving countries, trust and transparency are needed, which can only be achieved when a detailed monitoring and reporting plan is executed.

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I. Introduction

1. Since the third session of the United Nations Forum on Forests, the children and youth major group has been actively involved in the processes of the Forum, in particular by submitting inputs addressing key issues for youth and children and voicing their priorities for sustainable forest management.

2. The primary objective of youth participation is to promote intergenerational equity in sustainable forest management through education, the transfer of knowledge and the right to access natural resources for the younger generations. Specifically, the goals of the participation of the youth and child representatives are:

(a) To use their capacity as a worldwide youth network to inform the policy dialogue debate from the perspective of young people;

(b) To demonstrate the potential of forest-related education in the implementation of sustainable forest management and international forest policy processes;

(c) To advocate ways to increase that potential;

(d) To promote the need and opportunities for stronger integration of forest-related education in the international forest policy dialogue at all levels.

3. At the Forum's eighth session, we would like to review the priorities of young people and assess the way they have been addressed by decision makers.

4. The present discussion paper has been compiled by the children and youth major group focal point team (International Forestry Students' Association, Global Youth Network and Initiatives-Jeunes) with the assistance of their network members.

II. Priority areas for action

A. Education and capacity-building

5. Education is a human right (article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Formal and informal forest education has a multiplying effect on the development of young people and their communities. Primary education is important in ensuring that children are affected at the most foundational stage in their lives; secondary education is important for raising environmental awareness among young people and educating them about ecosystems; and tertiary education is critical for ensuring the integrity of skills among foresters, the scientific community and other forest-related stakeholders.

6. Member States should support informal forest education by enhancing the capacity of youth organizations to carry out educational programmes. Young people are often highly motivated to contribute to the development of society, having fresh ideas and innovative approaches. Youth as a demographic can effectively contribute to the implementation of sustainable development, including sustainable forest management.

7. Education is the key to making wise decisions about the future of the world's forests, as it is central to enabling children and youth to understand and

communicate the link between using up resources today and the need to access them in the future in order to sustain their livelihoods. Criteria and indicators need to reflect the extent to which education has been integrated into national forest programmes and the national sustainable development agenda.

8. The children and youth major group believes that enhancing education and capacity-building, especially among young people, raises awareness and knowledge about forests and should therefore constitute a crucial addition to State and public and private sector efforts.

9. To work towards this, Member States are strongly encouraged to implement the promises they committed to in the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests (General Assembly resolution 62/98, annex) on quality forestry education and capacity-building quoted below:

National policies and measures

> "Promote and encourage access to formal and informal education, extension and training programmes on the implementation of sustainable forest management (non-legally binding instrument, para. 6 (u))
>
> "Support education, training and extension programmes involving local and indigenous communities, forest workers and forest owners, in order to develop resource management approaches that will reduce the pressure on forests, particularly fragile ecosystems (para. 6 (v))
>
> "Promote active and effective participation by major groups, local communities, forest owners and other relevant stakeholders in the development, implementation and assessment of forest-related national policies, measures and programmes (para. 6 (w))
>
> "Establish or strengthen partnerships, including public-private partnerships, and joint programmes with stakeholders to advance the implementation of sustainable forest management" (para. 6 (m))

International cooperation and means of implementation

> "Strengthen the capacity of countries to address forest-related illegal practices, including wildlife poaching, in accordance with domestic legislation, through enhanced public awareness, education, institutional capacity-building ..." (non-legally binding instrument, para. 7 (j))

10. Constructive intergenerational cooperation is what the basis of a common future is built upon. In order to frame this future sustainably, solution-oriented approaches are needed that require pragmatic gateways to participation for youth and children. Failing to implement the commitments in the non-legally binding instrument means aborting the last chance to set these up.

11. The non-legally binding instrument can only be taken seriously if Member States are motivated to stick to their promises and compel each other to do so, inter alia, through mutual monitoring and reporting agreements.

B. Climate change

12. The substantial contribution of ongoing deforestation to climate change is a major concern. In the upcoming decades, the effects of climate change will be suffered in particular by rural communities in developing countries, where building up a sustainable future will become even harder and children will suffer the most.

C. Stopping deforestation

13. Ongoing deforestation and unsustainable use of forests leads to a growing number of people living in poverty or facing a poor future. Children are particularly affected, as this often prevents them from attending school.

14. With the predicted increase in global population, the pressure on forests will merely increase, leading to more people living in poverty. This means that even more children will face an insecure future.

D. Participation

15. Forest issues and their complexity often exclude the uninformed young person concerned with the environment. It must be pointed out, however, that these young people still have the capacity, the basic knowledge and the motivation to contribute constructively to meeting the objectives of the Forum.

16. We regard the promotion of cross-sector cooperation as a key element of effective stakeholder participation and seek to foster the involvement of teaching and research institutions in decision-making processes. This translates into Member States fostering a national atmosphere that supports the growth of non-governmental organizations and collaboration.

III. Assessment of the United Nations Forum on Forests process

17. We welcome the opportunity given to young people to have a voice in the United Nations Forum on Forests through the multi-stakeholder dialogue. We are pleased by the increasing attention being paid to forest issues at the international level, but at the same time concerned by the relatively marginal impact this has had on deforestation. We would like to see a more political will to implement previous commitments and the non-legally binding instrument.

18. We fear that while forests become increasingly distant to urban youth, the linkages get weaker and the recognition of forests as a natural part of the living environment is diminished. Young people's access to forests should be ensured and facilitated in order to avoid a loss of interest in and connection to nature. Overall recognition of forests as a natural part of society should be enhanced, as should the role of local communities in forest management. The well-being of communities, fostered through ownership in forest management, directly influences the well-being of their children and young people.

National policies and measures

"Promote and strengthen public understanding of the importance of and the benefits provided by forests and sustainable forest management, including through public awareness programmes and education" (non-legally binding instrument, para. 6 (t))

IV. Recommendations on a financing mechanism and framework for sustainable forest management

19. **In applying means of implementation, including financial resources, capacity-building and the transfer of environmentally sound technology, the children and youth major group considers the following to be essential:**

(a) The creation of partnerships with local authorities, youth, children and stakeholders with a view to building the capacity of youth forest-related organizations at the local level;

(b) The establishment of criteria and indicators that reflect the status of education within national forest programmes and the status of forestry within national education curricula;

(c) The inclusion of youth and children stakeholders and tertiary education stakeholders in the design, implementation and evaluation of national forest programmes.

20. **For a decision on a voluntary global financial mechanism, a portfolio approach and a forest financing framework, the children and youth major group regards the following aspects as important:**

(a) Finance has to be taken seriously by investing and receiving countries. This means that donating countries should mobilize resources to the extent necessary to make the defined goals and objectives of the non-legally binding instrument (including the four global objectives on forests) a reality. For the countries that receive donations to work on their programmes, a clear and practical framework should be set up for indicators and monitoring;

(b) Children and youth are unable to provide financial resources, but they have repeatedly emphasized their value as ground staff in implementation if taken seriously as partners. We can provide a global educational network of students as a resource to provide both views and future collaboration among young people in implementation at the regional and subregional levels, as well as strong links to higher educational institutions as centres for both technological and scientific research and capacity-building around the world;

(c) Children and youth consider a portfolio approach to be a very concrete instrument for moving forward, as it is a way to translate global negotiations into action on the spot. However, we urge the subscribers to the non-legally binding instrument to start to define what and who is included in the portfolio. This instrument can do its job only when clearly defined.

V. Forests in a changing environment

21. **Talking about forests with respect to biodiversity conservation, including protected areas, the children and youth major group considers the following to be essential:**

(a) Forest conservation is closely linked to forest management practices that are adapted to climate change. Beyond the question of how far vegetation will be capable of readjusting to a changing climate in due time, diversity is a key prerequisite to provide forests with a broad reaction capacity;

(b) Children and youth therefore stress the need to preserve biodiversity and structural heterogeneity in forest ecosystems in accordance and association with the Convention on Biodiversity.

22. **To reverse the loss of forest cover, prevent forest degradation in all types of forest and combat desertification, including in low-forest-cover countries, the children and youth major group considers the following to be essential:**

(a) People living in rural areas suffer the most. The lack of alternative sources of food, fodder, firewood and income accelerates trees being cut, creating conditions under which regrowth does not take place;

(b) The only answer to this is sustainable forest management. To efficiently use, systematically maintain and methodically regenerate forest resources, forest inventories and forest management and afforestation plans have to be developed and implemented together with the civil society in place. Joint efforts have to result in purposeful communication and an even-handed sharing of benefits;

(c) The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is often seen as a very successful instrument when it comes to political will and financial resources. It also covers forests and therefore could play an important future role in conserving forests. Children and youth want to emphasize that forests have more functions than sequestrating carbon and that therefore a strong implementation of the non-legally binding instrument is just as essential as a successful climate framework.

23. **For achieving the four global objectives on forests and implementing the non-legally binding instrument, enhanced cooperation and policy and programme coordination and regional and subregional inputs, the children and youth major group emphasizes the importance of:**

(a) Poor people in developing countries will especially suffer the effects of unsustainable forest use. Sustainably managed forests can offer long-term sources of income and a sustainable future for this group, if they are given the legal right to use and tend forest resources;

(b) Forests are perhaps the most precious resource on our planet. They are essentially renewable and they offer numerous products and services to billions of people. People depend on these forests and have no future without them. Only worldwide sustainable management and conservation of our forest resources will give future generations a chance to continue benefiting from this resource;

(c) Linkages between regional meetings and the United Nations Forum on Forests through regionally existing structures are an obvious way to further improve

knowledge on forests and sustainable forest management as defined in the global objectives. They should promote bidirectional communication not only from decision maker to decision maker, but also decision maker to the people working on the ground, at all levels.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

24. **Forest areas worldwide are decreasing rather than increasing. This means that more and more people who depend on forests for their livelihoods, in particular in developing countries, are facing an unsustainable future. Climate change (largely brought about by deforestation) will even speed this process up. Education is under double pressure, as increasing poverty for a growing number of people reduces access to education every day, yet education on how to use resources sustainably is a key factor in maintaining forests for future generations.**

25. **To make the United Nations Forum on Forests and the non-legally binding instrument work, we have the following recommendations:**

(a) **Involve youth in implementing sustainable forest management;**

(b) **Educate youth and children so that they know how to carefully take care of their resources;**

(c) **Create criteria and indicators for forestry education;**

(d) **Do not count on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change when it comes to protection. Forests are more than carbon and will have a sustainable future only when the United Nations Forum on Forests is successful;**

(e) **Make sure that loss of forest cover is stopped by implementing sustainable forest management worldwide by:**

(i) **Implementing the non-legally binding instrument;**

(ii) **Starting to define the actors for and scale of the portfolio approach;**

(iii) **Building trust between investors and receivers by mobilizing sufficient resources, but at the same time implementing a good monitoring and reporting system.**

26. **Sustainable development means development that does not compromise the options of future generations. It is our responsibility to use and tend the natural resources we have left in a way that does not deprive our children of their right to meet their own needs, either now or in the future.**